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4 ON 'PENSION' FOR INVASION

Bay Of Pigs Fliers' Widows Get Untraceable Checks

Birmingham, Ala., March 3 (AP)

Every two weeks each of the widows of the four Birmingham airmen lost in the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba receives an envelope from the Bankers Trust Company of New York.

There is no message in the envelope. But there is a check in it for \$225.

The women do not know who is paying the money. They have been told they will continue to receive the checks unless they remarry.

First one bank official and then another signs the checks. There is no indication as to the identity of the account against which the checks are drawn.

Florida Corporation

At first the checks were drawn on the Double Check Corporation of Florida. The women know nothing about Double Check. Their only contact with it has been through a Miami Springs (Fla.) attorney. In the summer of 1961, the checks were changed and were issued by Bankers Trust.

Who were the men who were lost in the Cuban invasion?

The story given to their wives and the public at the time of their disappearance and presumed death indicates they were soldiers of fortune who had joined the anti-Castro forces for the invasion of Cuba for the money they could earn.

Their wives, however, say this could not be true and offer several reasons not to believe the story given the public. They feel strongly that there is a lot more to the story of the recruitment of their husbands and their mission than has been made public.

Many people here believe they were working for the Central Intelligence Agency.

The story of the four men was

Americans had died in the invasion. He did not identify the men, but presumably referred to the Birmingham fliers.

The men were:

Riley W. Shamburger, Jr., born in Birmingham November 17, 1924. A World War II pilot, he was a test pilot for Hayes International Corporation, a maker of missile components, and a major in the Alabama Air National Guard. He had more than 10,000 hours of flying time.

Wade C. Gray, born in Birmingham March 1, 1928. He had been a radio and electronics technician at Hayes but was unemployed at the time he was hired.

Thomas Willard Ray, born in Birmingham March 15, 1931. He was just returning from military duty at the time he left on the special mission, but had worked at Hayes.

Lee F. Baker, born in Boston in 1926. He operated a pizza establishment and had worked for Hayes. His widow now lives in the Los Angeles area.

The widows have received death certificates stating that their husbands died by accidental drowning. Shamburger's mother refused to believe her son is dead and has been in contact indirectly with Swiss authorities in hope they can find out something for her in Cuba. The Swiss Government handles affairs for this country in Cuba.

Destination Secret

The four men were recruited in January, 1961. They left here early in February of that year. The women did not know where their husbands were going.

Shamburger's widow said he told her he was going to instruct some men in flying the B-26 bomber. Mrs. Gray's husband told her he was going to test fly planes in Texas. Ray told his wife he was going to a combined officers' training school. All said their work was secret.

The women wrote their husbands through a Chicago address: Joseph Greenland, P.O. Box 7924, Main Post Office. Their husbands' letters came from that address.

Late in April, 1961, they were informed their husbands had died April 19, the date of the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Alex E. Carlson came here from Miami Springs on behalf of Double Check to tell the women of their husbands' disappearance. He urged them to say nothing about it, asserting that there was a possibility they were alive.

No Hope Is Held

Later Carlson and a Birmingham attorney, Thomas F. McDowell, told them that there was no hope and that the story was to be given to the newspaper.

Carlson told newsmen in May, 1961, that the men were operating a C-46 cargo plane. He said he did not know the nature of the cargo nor its destination.

The crew was operating under orders not to break radio silence except in case of extreme emergency. A voice was heard over the radio that one of the engines had failed and the plane was losing altitude rapidly. That, Carlson said, was the last contact with the plane and its crew.

The attorney said a check of the area where the aircraft was believed to have gone down turned up wreckage.

He said Double Check had gotten in touch with the four men on behalf of an organization that requested that its identity remain confidential.

Carlson said that Double Check could be described as a "broker," and that the only four men recruited by it were the four local ones. He gave no other information about Double Check.

"Calculated Risk" Noted

"These men knew what they were getting into," Carlson said in 1961. "It was a calculated risk. If they came back they had a nice nest egg."

The families of the men resent this statement very much.

"My husband was no soldier of fortune or adventurer," said Mrs. Ray. "He would talk to me about his fear that our two children would have to grow up under communism."

"I've heard it has been told around town we all got \$150,000 and are getting \$1,000 a month. There's no truth in it. My husband didn't get any bonus and he was just getting a salary. Sure it was more than he was making. But he's gone and a few years from